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Thesis Statement

1980’s: The Revolution of Toys

If I could take a walk through any store containing any number of toys, I bet the same scenario will replay itself. For example, let’s say I’m strolling down one of the aisles and stop to look at one of the obnoxiously cute toys that now fill the shelves. I would then make a comment about how adorable it is and say how I wished I was still little so that I could own one. My mother would then run towards me, shoulder me out of the way (which would cause me to fly many feet backwards). Then she would proceed to reflect back on the ‘good ol’ days’ when she had one of these toys. I’m sure anyone whos parents grew up in the1980’s witnesses the same thing. These repeating events are what lead me to my subject, of toys n the nineteen eighties. They range anywhere from small cheap little objects, like Transformers and Ewoks, to more complex things, like the Atari. Because of the toys popularity it has caused many toy collectors to call the ‘80s the ‘Toy Revolution’. Because my relatives and friend’s relatives seem o reminisce back on the days they played with these toys, it has made me greatly interested to delve deeper into the world of 1980’s toys.

The years of the ‘Toy Revolution’ has caused many collectors, and even historians, to single their research down to a specific topic. However, focusing on some of the most popular toys of the ‘80’s it is quite simple and easy to elucidate. During this decade, there were a few main companies trucking out some of the main toys: Hasbro, Kenner, American Greetings, and Hallmark. Yes, the card companies that we all know and love were main factors in toy history. These toys that many are most likely familiar with, whether it was in the 1980’s or you have seem them now on shelves across the world, were produced by card companies. Take for example Rainbow Brite, Strawberry Shortcake, and Carebears. In 1984, Hallmark produced Rainbow Brite as a kid friendly, yet comical card. (Ghost of the Doll) As soon as these cards hit the shelves, people all over fell in love with them. This caused, in that same year, Hallmark to self produce plastic dolls, which were later followed by plush toys. On June 27, the demand had become so high that Hallmark was able to produce a TV show that lasted for three years. While this may not one of the most lingering toys of the 1980’s, they are still recognized throughout all these years. However, the fruity smelling doll, named Strawberry Shortcake, has never left the minds or the hearts of people. She was created by Hallmarks rival, American Greetings in 1977. But it was only in the 1980’s she made her way to the shelves. She was such a huge hit, that every little girl was askng for her board games, jewelry, costumes, clothing, and dolls for a solid five years. Although it was designed by American Greetings, it was not self-produced, but rather produced by Kenner. Another toy that was designed by American Greetings and produced y Kenner, were the bears that grabbed the heart of the nation: Carebears. It was in 1981, that they made their first debut as a greeting card. Then in ’83 they were able to push themselves on the shelves, and up on the charts. Because every girl, all ages, had her bed chock full of these plush teddy bears, the two companies banded together to make not only a TV show, but multiple movies.

Kenner didn’t produce toys from just card companies, they also produced their own. However, their toys were less successful, but still considered ‘80s classics. For example, Star Wars: Ewoks. For anyone that doesn’t know, they were the bearlike creatures that were featured in the Star Wars film, Return of the Jedi. These posable action figures were collectables among many. Therefore, they came with cards, large plastic coins, and one or two accessories. Starting in 1983, they aired a cartoon series based off the figurines. These lasted till 985. Kenner also produced many play sets, one of its more popular one is Wish World Kids. These lasted for two years, starting in 1987 to 1989. It consisted of tiny two inch dolls that could fit in your pocket, or in their changeable play sets.

A more popular company with more popular toys was Hasbro. In 1982, they mass produced My Little Pony. They created a toy that has lasted for two decades, and has been in the heart of every child since then. They weren’t just popular with children; many adults also had large collections of the ponies. These figurines weren’t the only toy from the 80’s to make a large comeback in the new millennium, Transformers were also in the loop. They were originally created and distributed by Takara Tomy, a Japanese company. The Hasbro, after a difficult battle with the company, was able to buy rights to distribute them in North America. They were an instant hit with kids everywhere, causing the comic books to be written, and later a regular TV series.

Just because big companies were producing these toys, it had no effect on their popularity rating. Take for example the Rubik’s cube, Atari, Cabbage Patch Kids, and Pac Man. In 1981, over one million Rubik’s Cubes were sold and they were produced by a smaller company named the Ideal Toy Company. Another very popular toy, that possibly paved the way for all gaming systems yet to come, was the Atari. It was produced within its own company, Atari Inc. Another popular game, that parents will plow kids over to get to, is Pac Man. In October of 1980, it hit almost all video arcades in the United States. However, it started from a Japanese company, Namco Limited. Feinstein said that the Pac-Man fad hit kids so hard, they spent over $1 billion to rack up record scores. Also no one can forget the ugly, yet adorable, Cabbage Patch Kid Dolls. These appeared in 1983, and immediately children all around the country fell in love with them. These were produced by Coleco industries, a not so popular toy industry at the time. However, these popular dolls more than once caused riots in stores, while mothers where trying to get them for their children.

While I was researching these toys, I was surprised to see how many I remember seeing my brother or sister own, and even how many I still see in stores today. These multiple toys make me wish I could go back in time, to not only collect all of them, but to witness this pinnacle in toy history. And to witness the makings of the toys that made the way for all toys to come.